



Town of Brookline

Massachusetts

Department of Planning and
Community Development

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Alison C. Steinfeld
Director

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Zoning Board of Appeals
Town of Brookline
333 Washington Street
Brookline, MA 02455

RE: The Residences at South Brookline I
Application for a Comprehensive Permit

Dear Chairman Geller and Members of the Board of Appeals:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments relative to the Comprehensive Permit application submitted by Chestnut Hill Realty for the redevelopment of Hancock Village. The Planning Department will comment primarily on the site plan and defer to the expertise of other departments that are addressing the potential impacts of the redevelopment plan.

The proposed project as currently designed is not appropriate for the site. First and foremost, the existing built environment is officially eligible for designation in the National Register of Historic Places. That eligibility is attributed primarily to the distinctive character of the site plan. Intrinsic to the existing residential complex is a respect for the topography, environment, and residents. Natural resources are integrated into the plan; beautifully designed, maintained and usable green space is a *paramount* land use; pedestrian circulation takes precedence over vehicular circulation; and a sense of community and livability is dominant. The proposed development is inconsistent with the existing site plan given that it undermines the character of the community, eliminates green space, effectively destroys significant natural resources, and subordinates the pedestrian to the vehicular traffic.

The design plan submitted is inappropriate for several key reasons:

1. The greenbelt buffer, a critical component of the Garden City model, is effectively eliminated, leaving only a handful of mature tree specimens.
2. A significant puddingstone outcropping is essentially destroyed.
3. The site plan isolates the residents from existing pedestrian circulation patterns.

4. The four-story apartment building (plus two levels of underground parking) is placed on the highest location within the complex, thereby contributing to its inordinate presence relative to the surrounding town homes.
5. The proposal creates dead-end streets, which complicate traffic flow and create difficult conditions for emergency apparatus.
6. The new buildings are not integrated into the existing development. The proposed siting of the structures would in fact create a sense of incongruity in that neither the large apartment building nor the twelve multi-family buildings would be oriented in any positive way to the existing buildings, street facades or each other. This is particularly glaring given that an underlying design feature of Hancock Village is the positioning of residences toward each other to create a dynamic sense of community.

The site plan is inefficient. It uses up too much land and in doing so is inconsistent with the Commonwealth's Sustainable Development Principles. Contrary to the Applicant's assertions, the proposed project does not constitute SMART growth—it is in fact antithetical to SMART growth principles that promote cohesive, efficient and coordinated development and redevelopment. Most notably, the proposal does not represent "development that is compact, conserves land, protects historic resources, and integrates uses." Rather than "increase the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space and recreational opportunities," The Residences at South Brookline I will result in a net decrease in the amount of green space while, at the same time, essentially destroying a major puddingstone outcropping. The proposed project actually promotes new, low density development in what are deliberately designed and actively used recreational areas.

On behalf of the Town, the Planning Department is responsible for promoting subsidized housing and is in fact justifiably proud of its efforts to expand housing opportunities and to improve existing affordable housing. But, that responsibility includes a commitment to ensure quality development that is well-sited and consistent with the character of the neighborhood and the town in general. This proposal is not compatible with those responsibilities.

The Planning Department is committed to working with the Applicant to develop a better design that respects Chestnut Hill Realty's priorities as well as those of the Town and neighborhood. Accordingly, we urge the Board of Appeals to encourage the Applicant to discuss alternative site designs with the ZBA, other Town officials and staff, and our consultants. We are confident that we can work with the developer to achieve our respective goals and objectives with the result being a development that exemplifies Chestnut Hill Realty's commitment to high quality residential communities including, perhaps most notably, Hancock Village.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Alison C. Steinfeld
Planning Director